

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001808

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, INR/NESA
NSC FOR E. MILLARD
PLEASE ALSO PASS TOPEC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10-17-13

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: In meeting with Ambassador, Opposition Leader discusses peace process and cohabitation stresses

Refs: Colombo 1781, and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead.
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: On October 16, Ambassador Lunstead met with Opposition Leader Mahinda Rajapakse. During the discussion, Rajapakse highlighted public support for peace, but he noted that the GSL's peace efforts were at a crucial stage and it had to handle the matter with the utmost care. Regarding cohabitation, he felt that the President and Prime Minister needed to work together to make the peace process a success. He went on to confirm that his party's proposed alliance with the radical JVP had been called off. In keeping with his reputation, Rajapakse was quite amiable in personality and moderate in his comments. END SUMMARY.

Call on the Opposition Leader

2. (SBU) Continuing his round of introductory calls, Ambassador Lunstead met October 16 with Mahinda Rajapakse, leader of the Opposition in Parliament. Rajapakse is a key figure in President Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the main constituent element in the People's Alliance (PA). Poloff also attended the meeting as notetaker.

Ground Level Support for Peace

3. (C) Queried about the peace process, Rajapakse agreed with the Ambassador that it was at a crucial stage. He added that most people were waiting to see what would happen over the next several weeks when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) released their counterproposals in response to the GSL's north/east interim administration plan. With the LTTE's response on its way, he noted that the GSL's peace efforts were at a crucial stage and it had to handle the matter with the utmost care. Ninety percent of the people want peace, he stated, but the government needs to do a better job in campaigning for support for the process in the south. He commented that the government's approach of late was to blame the LTTE for problems with the peace process. By not working to garner more public support for its peace efforts, the GSL risked increasing support for groups like the radical, anti-peace process Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).

Cohabitation Stresses

4. (C) Turning to the cohabitation situation, Rajapakse underlined that President Kumaratunga must work together with Prime Minister Wickremesinghe for the sake of the peace process. He admitted, however, that he sensed a widening divide between the two leaders, fueled perhaps by the President's desire to finish what she felt she had started -- the peace process with the Tigers. Stating that Kumaratunga would listen to the international community, Rajapakse thought this might be the only pressure that would encourage her to work amicably with the PM.

5. (C) Although Kumaratunga could not be reelected in 2006 due to constitutional restrictions, Rajapakse was sure that she remained intent on being active in politics in Sri Lanka beyond that time. She could retain power, he said, by convincing United National Party (UNP) MPs to switch to the PA or by garnering public support through an election, although she was not considering dissolving Parliament at this time. Referring to Anura Bandaranaike, the president's brother and Rajapakse's political rival in the PA, he added that he did not support Anura's call for the President's retirement from politics after her presidential term

expires.

No Alliance with the JVP

16. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's question, Rajapakse stated that the proposed PA-JVP alliance was no longer under discussion. He regretted, however, that the few PA members still in favor of the pact were "close confidantes" of the President. Commenting on the recent anti-peace process marches by the JVP, Rajapakse said several PA members including Anura Bandaranaike had also participated without being penalized by their party.

COMMENT

17. (C) In keeping with his reputation, Rajapakse was quite amiable in personality and moderate in his comments. This puts him at odds with Anura Bandaranaike, his main party rival, who has grown increasingly strident in his opposition to the peace process and the GSL's economic reform plans. Given his reputation as a politician with a strong base in the Sinhalese Buddhist south, Rajapakse is an important figure for the UNP government to keep generally on its side with respect to the peace process. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

LUNSTEAD